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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 WARSAW 000107

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PL](#)  
SUBJECT: POLAND'S DIVIDED LEFT

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[1](#)B. WARSAW 82

Classified By: Political Counselor Daniel Sainz for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: There is strong consensus among Poland's left-wing parties that they could garner as much as 25 percent of the vote in June 2009 European Parliament elections by running a unified list. Although the left pays dearly for its division, its leaders cannot decide how, and under whose banner, to unite. The prolonged power struggle within the biggest left-wing party, between Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) leaders Grzegorz Napieralski and Wojciech Olejniczak, has caused major party figures to defect and voters to gravitate to either Civic Platform (PO) or (PiS). Successive efforts to form a united electoral bloc, e.g., "Open Poland," have come up short because of personal and political differences. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Poland's leading post-communist left party, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), has been in disarray since losing power to the populist Law and Justice (PiS) in 2005. A number of prominent SLD figures defected to form smaller parties and political movements, such as Marek Borowski's Social Democracy Poland (SDPL). An effort, headlined by former President Aleksander Kwasniewski, to reunite the parties under the banner of a left/democrat electoral coalition fell short in 2007 parliamentary elections, capturing only 13% of the vote. Shortly thereafter, then-SLD chair Wojciech Olejniczak (who served as Agriculture Minister from 2003-2005 under PM Belka) dissolved the electoral coalition.

SLD BARELY ABOVE ELECTORAL THRESHOLD

[1](#)3. (SBU) In May 2009, Grzegorz Napieralski ousted Olejniczak as party chair. Since then, the two young SLD leaders have been involved in a very public struggle for power, as Napieralski has tried and failed to remove Olejniczak from his position as SLD parliamentary caucus chair (ref A). Over the past year, SLD has consistently polled just above the five percent electoral threshold for parliamentary representation. SLD's public support briefly spiked in December (up to 11 percent) when SLD joined with the ruling coalition to override President Kaczynski's veto of early retirement reform legislation, but has since dropped back to 7 percent.

TOO MANY LEADERS, NO IDEAS

[1](#)4. (C) Sylwia Pusz -- a former SLD youth leader and MP (1997-2001) -- who left SLD in 2004 to help Borowski establish SDPL, expressed regret that Napieralski had become more confrontational and heavy-handed in recent years. (NB: Pusz was considered a leading candidate to succeed Borowski, who stepped down as SDPL chair in the wake of a party finance dispute. Instead, she backed Wojciech Filemonowicz, who was elected party chair in early January.) Napieralski, she

said, was conciliatory and open to cooperation when he joined SLD, but is now intent on building and uniting "hard-core" left-wing parties on his own terms. Napieralski has eschewed cooperation with the governing Civic Platform (PO), while Olejniczak has publicly spoken out in favor of cooperation with PO when it serves SLD's interests.

15. (C) Pusz said Napieralski takes advice from former PMs Leszek Miller and Jozef Oleksy, unpopular politicians tainted by communist pasts and corruption allegations. Miller and Oleksy have failed to propose any new ideas, choosing instead to rest on the laurels of SLD's previous accomplishments in power. Pusz claimed that both men are exploiting Napieralski for their personal gain -- i.e., to secure prominent positions on SLD's electoral list for June 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections.

#### SLD LOSING SUPPORT TO CIVIC PLATFORM AND LAW AND JUSTICE

16. (C) Pusz said the Napieralski-Olejniczak power struggle has caused voters to turn away from SLD, as has the absence of concrete policy initiatives. SLD either supports PO or PiS, but never presents its own proposals, she said. She noted that many SLD voters shifted their support to PO after Napieralski met with President Lech Kaczynski and agreed to sustain a presidential veto of a PO-proposed media law in August 2008. According to media reports, SLD's internal polling indicates that 30 percent of those who voted for SLD in 2007 would now vote for PO instead. SLD's polling also revealed that 19 percent of those who support PO in 2007 would not rule out the possibility of voting for SLD.

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17. (C) Pusz also argued that President Kaczynski and his brother, PiS chair Jaroslaw Kaczynski, have done an "excellent job" of siphoning off SLD voters, much as they did with the nationalistic League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self-Defense (SO) between 2005 and 2007. Pusz noted that PiS's support for social welfare programs makes it a popular alternative to traditional left-wing parties, primarily because PiS's emphasis on family values still resonates with many Polish voters. Media commentariat have also suggested that PiS's efforts to change its image (ref B) will further increase support among traditional left voters.

#### DIM PROSPECTS FOR UNIFIED LIST...

18. (C) On February 1, representatives of SDPL, the Democratic Party (PD), and the Greens will meet in Warsaw to discuss forming a united front of the left for the EP elections, the second such attempt in four months. The initiative is led by Dariusz Rosati, who reportedly has ambitions to be the united left's candidate for president in 2010, despite public disclaimers. "We do not plan to form a new party, or even an electoral coalition," Pusz said. Instead, the grouping of parties, which does not yet have a name, will discuss creating a joint electoral list. Pusz said that the grouping would welcome SLD participation, but that Napieralski has his own vision."

19. (C) Napieralski has stated publicly that SLD would welcome cooperation with SDPL, but has ruled out cooperation with PD because it is affiliated with the EP's Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), and not the Party of European Socialists (PES) grouping. Napieralski has said he plans to meet with Filemonowicz prior to the February 1 meeting. Filemonowicz was heavily involved with "Open Poland" (OP), a similar initiative launched in Krakow on October 18, 2008 to unite SDPL, PD, the Greens, and the Women's Party, as well as key SLD figures, such as former Interior Minister Ryszard Kalisz. At the time, Filemonowicz indicated that SLD had "outlived its mission" and could no longer effectively counter PiS and PO. He said it was unlikely that OP would cooperate with SLD, but noted that Olejniczak had attended the October 18 conference only to

leave abruptly after receiving a text message from advisers telling him to "get out of there."

¶10. (C) Another key figure in efforts to unite the left -- and a potential Rosati rival -- is former Prime Minister Wlodzimierz Cimoszewicz (SLD), who is reportedly trying to mediate between Napieralski and Olejniczak. Cimoszewicz has long championed a united left ticket for EP elections and would be a logical candidate to top a unified list. According to SLD MP Marek Wikinski, Cimoszewicz is also the most likely SLD candidate for president in 2010, but is "thin-skinned and does not know how to connect with voters." In addition, former President Kwasniewski added to the mix with his public suggestion that former Defense Minister Jerzy Szmajdzinski would be a strong presidential candidate who could unite the left.

...DESPITE ADVANTAGEOUS POLITICAL CLIMATE

¶11. (C) Pusz predicted that if the left does not form a unified coalition or if there are two left-party lists, only SLD would surpass the 5 percent threshold, winning at best three or four seats. Wikinski was less optimistic, saying it is unlikely that SLD would win any seats on its own. Both agreed that a united coalition of left and democratic parties -- running well-known candidates with previous experience -- could garner 20 to 25 percent of the vote in EP elections. Wikinski predicted that low turnout for EP elections, combined with declining popular support for Tusk due to fallout from the economic crisis, will benefit opposition parties, but not necessarily PiS. Napieralski and former Finance Minister Grzegorz Kolodko are reportedly working an anti-crisis economic strategy focused on small and medium-size businesses and on helping those hardest hit by the economic crisis. Without providing details, Napieralski asserted publicly that, unlike PiS and PO, SLD has a track record of effectively confronting economic crises.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) The left parties will be hard-pressed to field a unified list in EP elections, much less speak with one voice. At least for the foreseeable future, if the economic downturn causes voters to turn away from PO, it seems more likely that PiS will be the beneficiary. In the longer term, as memories of corrupt past SLD governments fade, it is likely that the SLD will re-emerge as a traditional left party that presents a viable alternative to PO and PiS. When the moment is ripe, an SLD heavyweight like Szmajdzinski or

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Cimoszewicz may sweep aside the squabbling young party leaders and reclaim the party mantle.

¶13. (U) This cable was coordinated with ConGen Krakow.  
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